

University Communities Housing Needs Survey

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Conducted on behalf of the Marcy Holmes Neighborhood Association
July, 2007**

*This report (NPCR 1262) is also available on the CURA website:
www.cura.umn.edu/search/index.php*

July, 2007

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) supported the work of the author of this work, but has not reviewed it for publication. The content is solely the responsibility of the author and is not necessarily endorsed by NPCR.

NPCR is coordinated by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota. NPCR is supported by grants from The Minneapolis Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, The Bremer Foundation, and The St. Paul Travelers Foundation.

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University Communities Housing Needs Survey

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This project was supported [in part] through student research assistance provided by Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization, a program of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA).

Completed January 2007

Introduction

The University of Minnesota has always been a great force in influencing the surrounding neighborhoods' stock of businesses, services and housing. With regard to housing in particular, as the university has grown, so has the demand for undergraduate housing. This demand and the subsequent rise in undergraduate housing has led to a considerable loss of owner-occupied homes in the area, due to buy-outs and the deteriorating sense of safety and community associated with these areas.

To address their community concerns, the university-area neighborhoods of Marcy-Holmes, Southeast Como, and Prospect Park commissioned a survey to better understand the housing needs of the faculty and staff at the university, as well as graduate students, alumni and retired faculty. The survey was designed to gauge the interest of respondents in moving closer to the area, and what community and housing amenities they would need to make this transition. The survey and analysis were sponsored by the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

The survey received a total of 625 responses. A great majority - 87% - of survey respondents would consider moving closer to the university area if more desirable housing were available, and of those who do research at the university, 86% believe living closer to campus would benefit their research work. A total of 317 staff members responded, 156 graduate students, 56 faculty, 44 alumni, 42 retired faculty, and 20 who defined their relationship with the university as "other." (Five respondents were duplicates.) Many individuals who responded hold more than one association with the University of Minnesota, but for the purposes of reporting they will be identified as they initially identified themselves.

The survey was conducted through an online survey resource, and was disseminated through the university's Office of Community Relations, Graduate and Professional Students Association, the Alumni Association, and other university groups. Questions varied from basic demographic data regarding age, zip code of residence, and association with the University of Minnesota, to specific housing questions covering desired amenities in prospective neighborhoods, housing preferences, and what the respondents could afford to spend on housing. The survey also asked for written comments regarding housing and living in the university communities.

Staff Responses

Of the 317 university staff members who responded, 88% stated that they would be interested in moving closer to campus if more desirable housing were to become available. Nearly half - 45% - were interested in houses, and about 40% would be interested in condominiums and townhouses priced from \$150,000-\$250,000.

Access to public transportation and a local grocery store would be important factors in their housing decisions. Many of their written comments were regarding transportation, including both complaints of limited access from nearby neighborhoods, and a lack of safe bicycle lanes to and from the campus. Another major concern raised was the high price for single family homes in the campus area, which would be out of their reach. Among the staff respondents, 63% currently live in houses, and only 42% live within five miles of campus.

Faculty Responses

Of the 56 faculty that responded, 94% stated they would move closer to the university if adequate housing were available, and 61% would seek a house if they made the move. About 44% said their price range for buying a home would be \$250,000-\$350,000, with the remaining faculty respondents spread between groups who would pay above or below this price range. Of those who would rent housing, 52% would pay between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per month, with the remaining spread between rents higher or lower.

When asked about desired community and housing amenities, 71% reported that bike lanes were important to their decision, and 78% stated that access to public transportation was a factor. In the written comments, faculty members overwhelmingly stated transportation as a main issue, either in access to bus routes or to safe bicycle lanes. Among the faculty respondents, 66% live in a house, and 50% live within five miles of the university.

Graduate Student Responses

Of the 156 graduate student respondents nearly 93% reported that they would move closer if desirable housing were made available. More than half - 52% - would look for an apartment, 20% a house, 21% a townhouse or condominium, and the remainder a co-op or other housing type. Regarding rent prices, 71% stated that they would look for rent less than \$750.

When asked what amenities they would be interested in if they moved closer to the U, 83% stated that public transportation would be a major factor, which was backed up by multiple written comments regarding the lack of transportation from certain areas surrounding the university. The majority of written comments stated the need for quiet housing and the development of housing specifically for graduate students. There were also many comments about a reluctance to live in an area dominated by undergraduate students, and to living in housing designed for and occupied by mostly undergraduates. Among the graduate student responses more than 60% live within five miles of campus and just more than 60% live in apartments.

Alumni & Retired Faculty and Staff Responses

Of a total of 86 respondents in this group, 57% said they would be interested in moving closer to the university area if desirable housing were available. The highest responses for desired amenities in housing were covered parking at 87%, and a grocery store in the community at 83%. Among the respondents, 64% live in houses, and 47% live within five miles of the campus.

Three emerging themes - needs for housing, safety and transportation

Housing Needs

Graduate student and student family housing

The university currently maintains the Commonwealth Terrace Cooperative and the Como Student Cooperative. This housing is available only for 824 families and excludes the single adults that make up the majority of the 13,900 student graduate school. In written comments, a common theme voiced by graduate students focused on the fact that no appropriate graduate student housing exists either on or nearby campus. Graduate student respondents specifically were concerned that quiet and safe housing was not available close to campus, and that available housing was dominated by undergraduate students.

Development of housing appropriate for graduate students who are moving to the area, as well as for students whose major function involves research, could greatly improve the university's ability to recruit and retain quality graduate students. Recruitment and retention could be enhanced not only by quality graduate student housing close to the school, but also by the community building among students that would result from such housing.

Faculty and Staff housing

Another concern was raised regarding faculty housing for individuals working at the university. The university currently maintains Pillsbury Court, a 48-unit townhouse development six blocks from the campus. This complex houses new faculty for up to two years; but any faculty who have lived in the area prior to employment are ineligible for a unit. Faculty and staff voiced a desire for development of new condominiums close to campus. There were also concerns that the housing available through the university's off-campus housing office is generally rundown and geared for undergraduate living, and that the university does not distinguish between the housing needs of the different university groups. A major problem with university area housing is that many properties are managed to maximize profit, superseding decent living standards. This creates serious problems such as illegal over-occupancy and other code violations making many unsuitable for family or professional living.

Home buying assistance

Another major concern expressed by survey respondents was regarding housing prices in the area. Many respondents would be interested in purchasing condominiums or townhouses close to campus, but the prices are out of reach for someone working on a staff salary. While the university has little to do with overall prices in the region, it has done little to help their employees and students purchase houses in the area, and has also done little to help develop affordable housing for these individuals. Some mentioned home buyer assistance programs at other large universities that allow first time home buyers to secure low-interest loans and grants for the purchase of property close to campus.

Safety Needs

One of the major concerns expressed by many individuals was a lack of safety in the university neighborhoods. Safety has long been a concern in these neighborhoods, and seems to be a growing concern for people living in the area as well as individuals considering purchasing in the area. Further there is the concern that these neighborhoods are not suitable for families with children. Many respondents commented about having to deal with loud parties, trash, public drunkenness and urination, and highly transient renters as neighbors. Development of housing for faculty, staff, and graduate students could offer opportunities for people with common interests and lifestyles to live without the concerns generally associated with renting in an area with a highly concentrated undergraduate population.

Transportation Needs

A surprising finding from this survey is the strong commentary regarding transportation issues. When asked about amenities for prospective neighborhoods, 74.5% responded that access to public transportation was a major factor in where they decided to live. Many people commented on the lack of bus routes that reach communities close to the

university. One respondent stated that they lived a mere three miles from campus, but it took more than an hour to reach the university by bus. Other staff and faculty commented on the lack of express buses to campus during the summer months. Many faculty and staff responded that they were concerned about the lack of safe bike lanes leading to the campus, and that if they were available, their commute would be quicker and safer.

Conclusions

Many conclusions can be gained from the data collected from this survey. The author's suggestions are informed by the participants' responses and the existing needs of the communities in question, which again fall into three categories: housing, transportation, and safety.

Housing

The University of Minnesota needs to work with developers and community groups to help develop housing opportunities for faculty, staff and graduate students. These housing needs are varied and fall into four distinct areas.

- The University of Minnesota needs to help develop graduate student housing on the scale of Commonwealth Terrace Cooperative on the Minneapolis campus. Such housing is needed for families and especially for single adults. Development of similar housing will help in recruitment of valuable students and help to create a collegiate community for student residents.
- The university and its surrounding communities need to encourage development of affordable faculty and staff-only housing close to campus that is rental as well as owner-occupied housing. This could take the form of condominium or townhouse developments. It is crucial that the university provide these options not only for visiting faculty, but also for individuals who are currently working at the university, and would benefit from the close proximity. University Grove neighborhood is currently a prime example of a faculty community housing development; however it is financially unattainable for many individuals currently employed by the university.
- The University of Minnesota needs to develop a comprehensive first-time home buyer program available to faculty and staff that would encourage homeownership in the nearby communities. Such a model is currently in use in many similarly large institutions such as UC Berkeley, UCSC, Princeton, University of Utah, and Johns Hopkins, and implementation of a similar program would serve the employees of the University and the surrounding communities as well.¹ Please see University of Minnesota Neighborhood Housing Study conducted by Gary DeCramer and MPP students at the Humphrey Institute, in the summer 2006 for more information on what other universities are doing.
- The university communities need to work with the University of Minnesota and local housing officials to take a role in discouraging absentee landlords and sub-par and often illegal housing commonly available to college students in the area. Such housing is a blight on the community, and creates potentially dangerous situations.

¹ This study is available through CURA website, www.cura.umn.edu.

Transportation

Two major themes emerged in this survey relating to transportation, and the correlating recommendations are seen below.

- The University of Minnesota needs to help develop a comprehensive network of bike lanes leading to and from the campus. This development would not only encourage energy-efficient commuting and cut down on the traffic and parking problems in and around the university, but it would also serve as an affirmation that the university is committed to engaging the surrounding communities. Such bike lanes would further offer safe and money-saving options for commuting.
- The University of Minnesota and the surrounding communities need to work with Metro Transit officials to ensure that staff, faculty and students are being well served by public transportation modes. An expansion of the university's circulator routes would also ensure that individuals were well served, and had easy access to the campus. These expanded routes would also encourage home buying in the area by individuals working for the university.

Safety

This survey turned up many concerns regarding safety in the area, and the author summarized them in one action step:

- The University of Minnesota needs to work with the local and university police as well as with local neighborhood organizations to engage citizens in community building and community patrols, and to increase police presence in the areas that the university so heavily populates. This will ensure the safety of current residents, and also make the area more attractive to potential buyers.

Summary Conclusion

While this survey was small in scope, it was able to tap a great deal of the hopes and frustrations of people living in the university communities and those who are interested in moving closer to campus. This survey an early step in understanding the need for responsible and quality development in the area that is specifically geared toward those involved with the University of Minnesota on a daily basis. In looking at the three categories of recommendations – housing, transportation, and safety, the university could partner with its neighbors to ensure a safe, affordable, and family friendly community without losing the university feel that makes these neighborhoods so unique and vital in the Twin Cities.

University Communities Housing Interest Survey

Answer:

In a recent survey of 625 university professionals and graduate students, more than 85% would consider moving close to campus if more desirable housing were available.

"I would love to live closer to the university than I do now. Right now it is because of cost that I live further away"

"If safe and affordable housing were available on or near campus, I would move down here from Anoka in a heartbeat!"

For more information on this survey please visit:

Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood
Association



www.marcy-holmes.org



www.cura.umn.edu

University Communities Housing Interest Survey

Question:

Why should we develop housing nearby the University of Minnesota?



University Communities Housing Interest Survey

The Survey

The online survey was conducted in late 2006 and was sponsored by Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association. Questions in the survey varied from basic demographic data to specific housing interests, it also asked for written comments regarding housing and living in the university communities.

The survey received a total of 625 responses. A great majority - 87% - of survey respondents would consider moving closer to the university area if more desirable housing were available, and of those who do research at the university, 86% believe living closer to campus would benefit their research work. A total of 317 staff members, 156 graduate students, 56 faculty, 44 alumni, and 42 retired faculty responded to the survey.

One respondent stated that they lived a mere three miles from campus, but it took more than an hour to reach the University of Minnesota by bus.

Conclusions

The results of this survey call for action steps in three main areas: housing, transportation, and safety.

1. Housing

- Develop a comprehensive first time homebuyer program to encourage faculty and staff to purchase houses close to the University of Minnesota campuses.
- Expand opportunities for faculty housing in communities adjacent to campus.
- Develop on-campus graduate student housing on the East Bank, as well as greatly improve the housing opportunities for graduate and professional students in the university communities.
- Work with city officials to ensure that all housing occupied by students, on campus and off, is safe and up to housing occupancy and safety codes

2. Transportation

- Work with Metro Transit to ensure that bus lines appropriately serve the university communities.
- Create a comprehensive network of bicycle lanes to and from campus to give people safe and environmentally friendly options of commute.

3. Safety

- Work with local police to ensure that the surrounding communities are a safe and family friendly place to live. Such steps may include increased police presence, adequate pedestrian lighting, and increased enforcement of under-age alcohol consumption laws.

These suggestions are informed by the participants' responses and the existing needs of the communities surrounding the University of Minnesota.

"Providing more affordable housing (especially condominiums) near the university would greatly improve quality of life for many faculty..."